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SOUTH CAROLINA DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMIT EVALUATION REPORT

A. Executive Summary

In 2004, the graduation rate for South Carolina Public Schools was 53.8 percent.[1] As part of an effort supported by the America's Promise Alliance to increase graduation rates across the United States, on December 2, 2008, the South Carolina Department of Education, AT&T of South Carolina, and State Farm Insurance hosted the South Carolina Dropout Prevention Summit. Over 1,000 people from a diverse range of sectors attended this event. The summit included a separate youth track to train young people in leadership and gain their input on solutions to the dropout issue.

The following report presents information from two sources: the conveners and local partners who planned the event, and those who attended the summit.

Highlights from the South Carolina summit include:

- 94 percent of attendees believe that the work they do around the dropout issue will be positively affected by the summit.
- 82 percent of attendees believe that the summit will lead to change in their communities.
- The summit launched a new state initiative titled "Graduation Matters". Through this initiative a statewide action plan will be enhanced.

This report summarizes both the value of the South Carolina summit as reported by attendees and the degree to which the summit has strengthened partnerships and community commitment to improve education. The next report will include a review of the post summit action plan and activities to determine the continued impact of the summit.

B. Summit Planning and Partner Engagement

One of the primary strategies the America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Summit initiative employs in its efforts to increase high school graduation rates, is to strengthen collaboration and partnerships among organizations concerned with dropout prevention and youth education. To facilitate this, the Alliance has encouraged summit conveners to engage a broad array of partners in summit planning and implementation, including the business community and other Alliance partners.

The organizations the summit convener engaged with in the planning and implementation of Dropout Prevention Summit related activities are presented below in Table 1. This list provides

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[1] This estimate is based on Chris Swanson's cumulative promotion index. Calculations were produced by the Urban Institute. Data were retrieved from School Data Direct http://www.schooldatadirect.org/

a snapshot of the convener's efforts to build a partnership inclusive of local community organizations, the diversity of the community, Alliance partners, the business community, and parallel local efforts.

Table 1

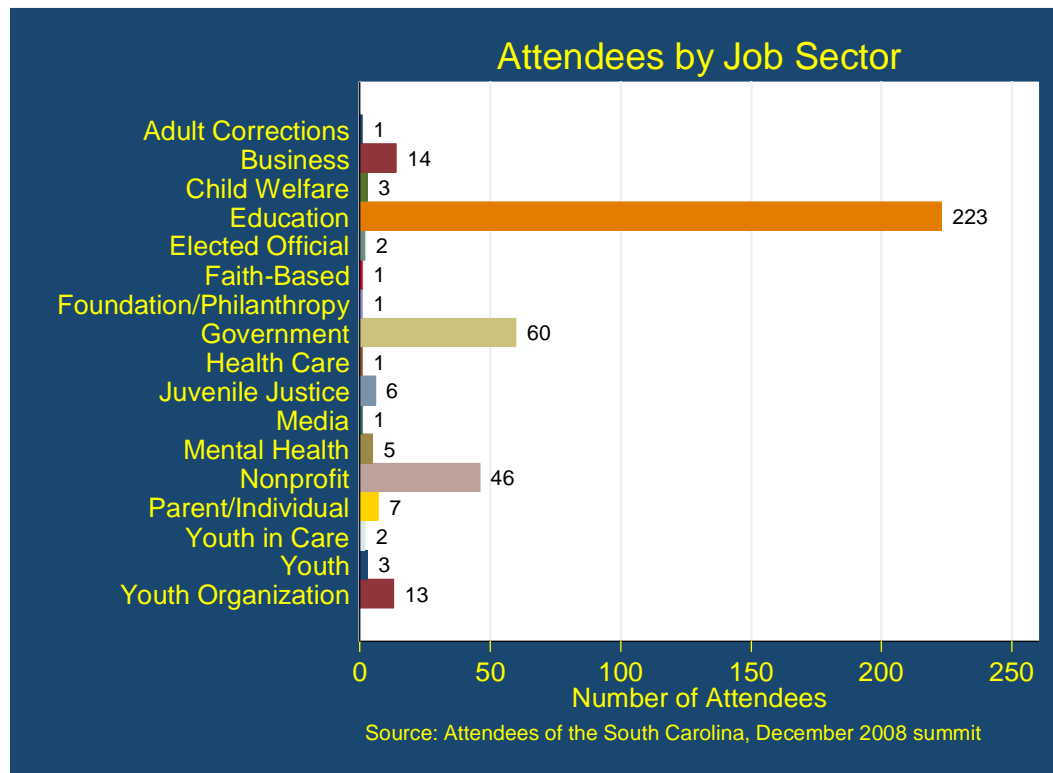| SOUTH CAROLINA DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMIT PARTNERS |
|---|
| • AT&T |
| • Bible Way Church of Atlas Road |
| • Central Carolina Community Foundation |
| • City Year |
| • Clemson University |
| • Columbia Urban League, Inc. |
| • Communities in Schools |
| • Department of Juvenile Justice School District |
| • Durham School Services |
| • Ferillo and Associates |
| • Graduate Greenville |
| • Healthy Learners Statewide Office |
| • Hope worldwide South Carolina |
| • Kershaw County School District |
| • Laurens County School District 55 |
| • National Dropout Prevention Center |
| • New Carolina |
| • New Horizon |
| • Office of the Governor |
| • Palmetto Health |
| • Palmetto Unified School District |
| • Personal Pathways to Success |
| • South Carolina Afterschool Alliance |
| • South Carolina Association of Public Charter Schools |
| • South Carolina Chamber of Commerce |
| • South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs |
| • South Carolina Commission on Higher Education |
| • South Carolina ETV |
| • South Carolina Head Start |

- South Carolina United Way/AmeriCorps South Carolina
- South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Center
- Senior Resources
- South Carolina Afterschool Alliance
- South Carolina Alliance of Black School Educators
- South Carolina Association of School Administrators
- South Carolina Department of Education
- South Carolina First Steps
- State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Ed
- State Farm
- The Richard W. Riley Institute
- The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
- The South Carolina Education Association
- Time Warner Cable
- United Way of the Midlands
- United Way, AmeriCorps
- University of South Carolina

C. Dropout Prevention Summit: Attendee Survey

Each summit convener was asked to submit basic demographic information on summit attendees, including email address, within a few days of the summit. Out of the approximately 1000 of summit attendees, the convener provided 616 valid email addresses and these were the individuals who were invited to complete the survey. There were 349 surveys completed for a response rate of 35 percent of total attendees and 57 percent of the individuals who were surveyed.

These individuals represented a variety of different sectors (See Graph 1).

Graph 1

Attendees by Job Sector

Job Sector	Number of Attendees
Adult Corrections	1
Business	14
Child Welfare	3
Education	223
Elected Official	2
Faith-Based	1
Foundation/Philanthropy	1
Government	60
Health Care	1
Juvenile Justice	6
Media	1
Mental Health	5
Nonprofit	46
Parent/Individual	7
Youth in Care	2
Youth	3
Youth Organization	13

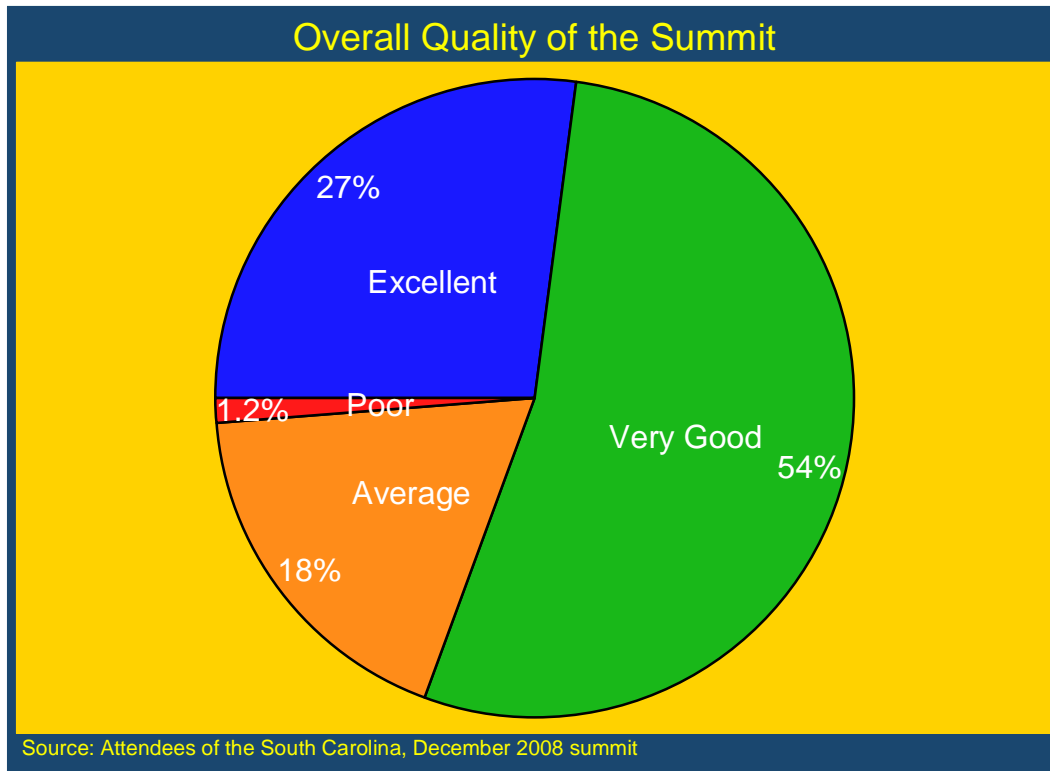Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

D. Summit Quality and Information

Dropout Prevention Summit attendees were asked to rate overall summit quality as well as the usefulness of the materials and information presented. Eighty-one percent of South Carolina summit attendees responded that the summit was "excellent" or "very good". An additional 18 percent reported that the summit was "average". Only 1 percent said that the summit quality was "poor" (See Graph 2).
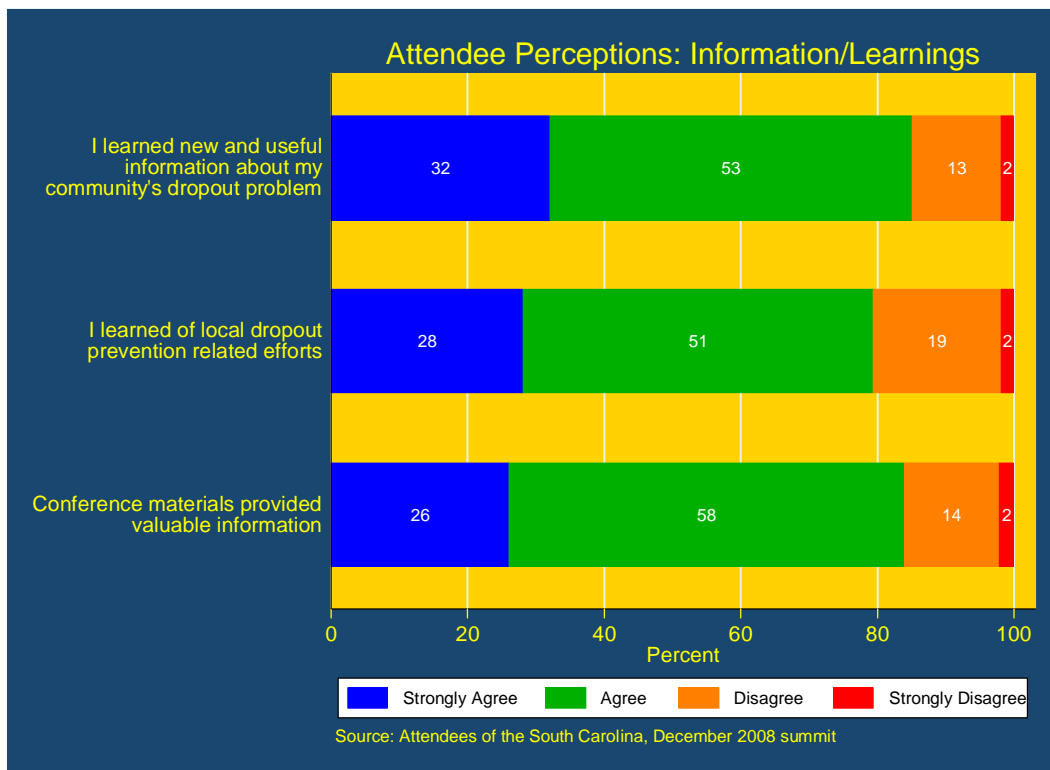
When asked questions about specific aspects of summit quality, 85 percent of attendees reported that they learned something new and useful about the local dropout problem, 79 said that they learned of new local initiatives, and 84 percent felt the conference materials provided valuable information (See Graph 3).[2]

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[2] We have combined response options "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" throughout this report.

Graph 2

Overall Quality of the Summit

27% Excellent

1.2% Poor

Very Good 54%

Average 18%

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

Graph 3

Attendee Perceptions: Information/Learnings

I learned new and useful information about my community's dropout problem — 32 | 53 | 13 | 2

I learned of local dropout prevention related efforts — 28 | 51 | 19 | 2

Conference materials provided valuable information — 26 | 58 | 14 | 2

Percent

Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

## E. Community Participation

Summit attendees were asked their perceptions of how well represented important stakeholder groups were in summit-related activities. Seventy-four percent felt that influential people from the community participated in the summit. Seventy-seven percent of respondents believed that the business community demonstrated a commitment to addressing the local dropout issue. Seventy-nine percent responded that the diversity of their community was represented at the summit. Ninety-five percent believed that "youth had the opportunity to share their opinions on the dropout issue" (See Graph 4).
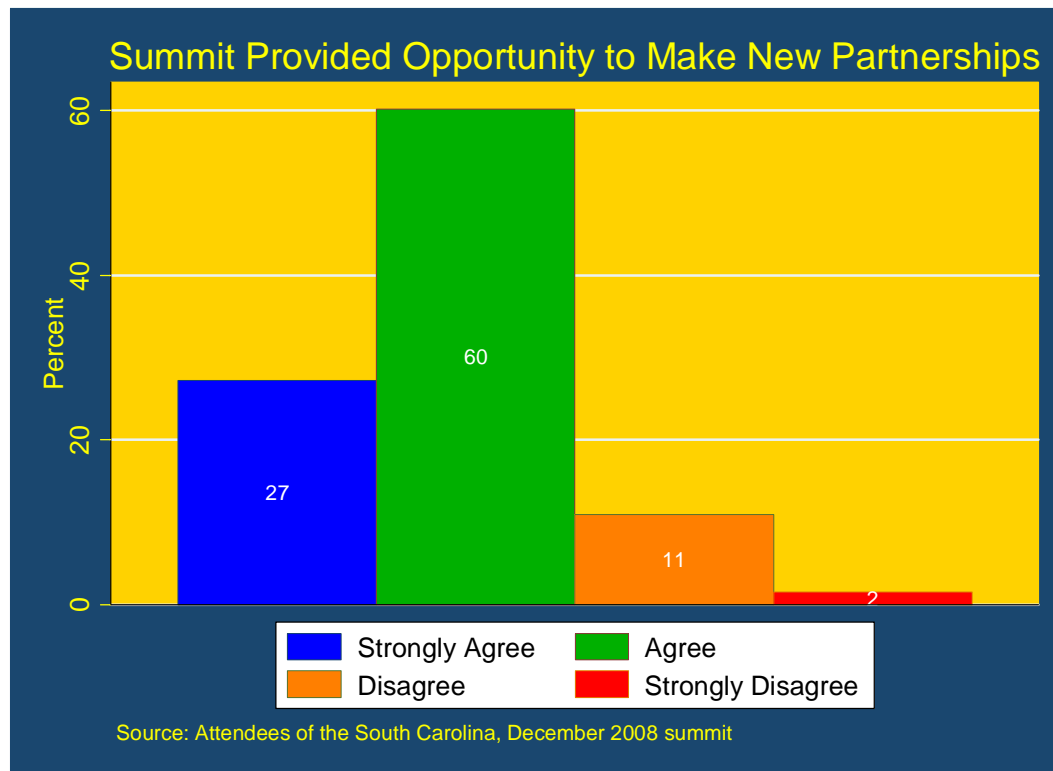
Graph 4

Attendee Perceptions: Community Participation

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit
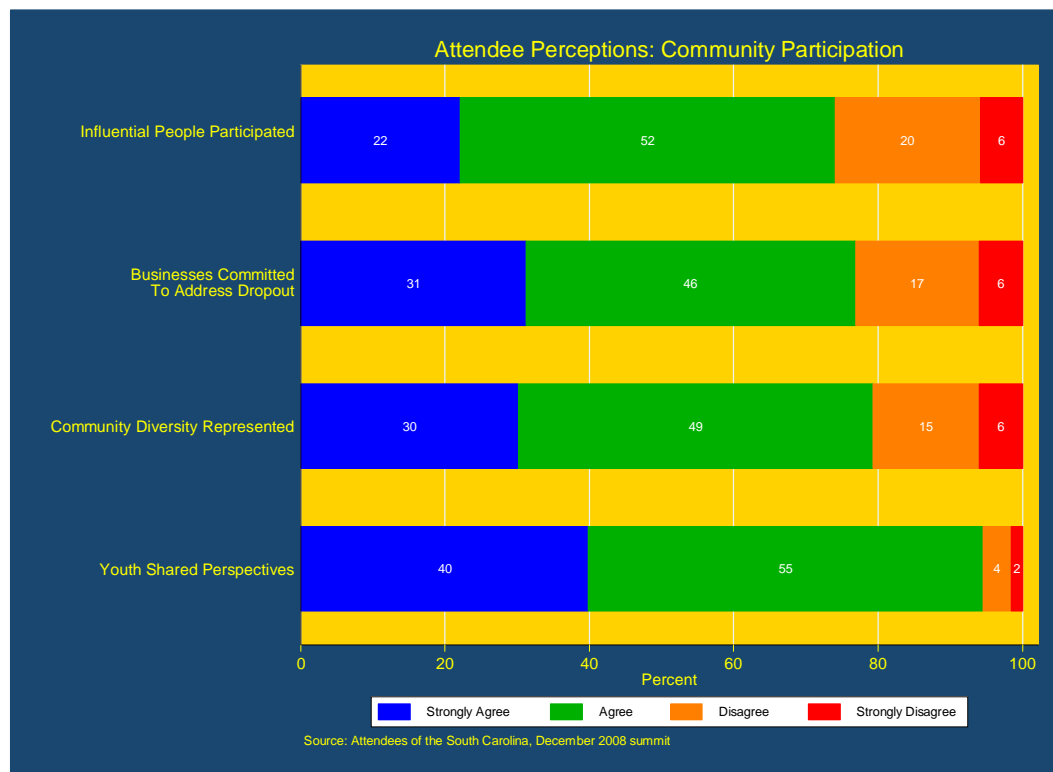
F. Partnership Development

A primary emphasis of the Dropout Prevention Summit initiative is building stronger partnerships and collaboration. Reflecting this emphasis, 87 percent of survey respondents felt that the summit provided the opportunity to develop new partnerships or connections (See Graph 5).

Graph 5

Summit Provided Opportunity to Make New Partnerships

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

- 27
- 60
- 11
- 2

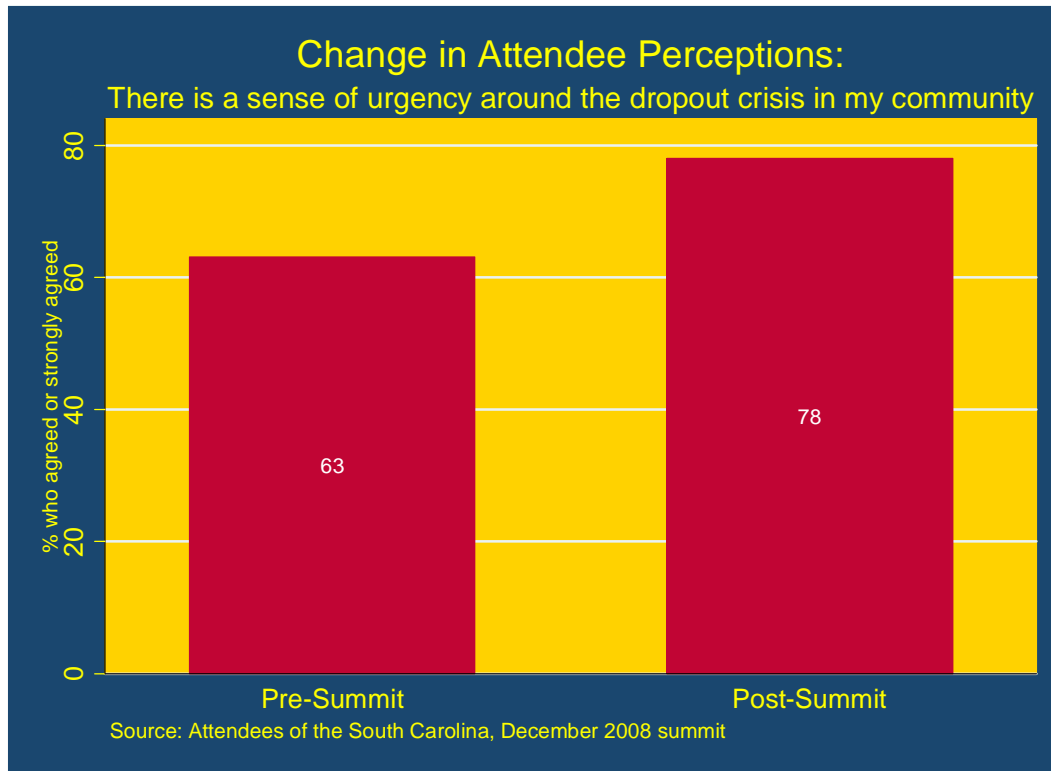Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

G. Summit Impact

A central premise of the Dropout Prevention Summit initiative is that these summits across the nation can plant the seeds of change and commitment to action around dropout prevention within the communities that host them, on both the community and individual level. By creating a sense of urgency around the Dropout Crisis, America's Promise hopes to inspire communities to collaborate in new ways and improve outcomes for youth. Summit attendees were queried in a variety of ways to assess if and how they felt the summit would impact themselves and the broader community.

Seventy-eight percent of South Carolina Dropout Prevention Summit survey respondents felt that there was a shared sense of urgency about the dropout issue in their community after the summit, compared to 63 percent before the summit (See Graph 6).

Graph 6

Change in Attendee Perceptions:
There is a sense of urgency around the dropout crisis in my community

% who agreed or strongly agreed

63 — Pre-Summit
78 — Post-Summit

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

The attendee survey went on to explore whether summit attendees believed the Dropout Prevention Summit would positively affect the work they do around the dropout issue, or lead to change in their community. Ninety-four percent of the South Carolina respondents stated they thought the summit would positively affect the work they do around the dropout issue, and 82 percent felt it would lead to change in their community (See Graph 7).

Graph 7
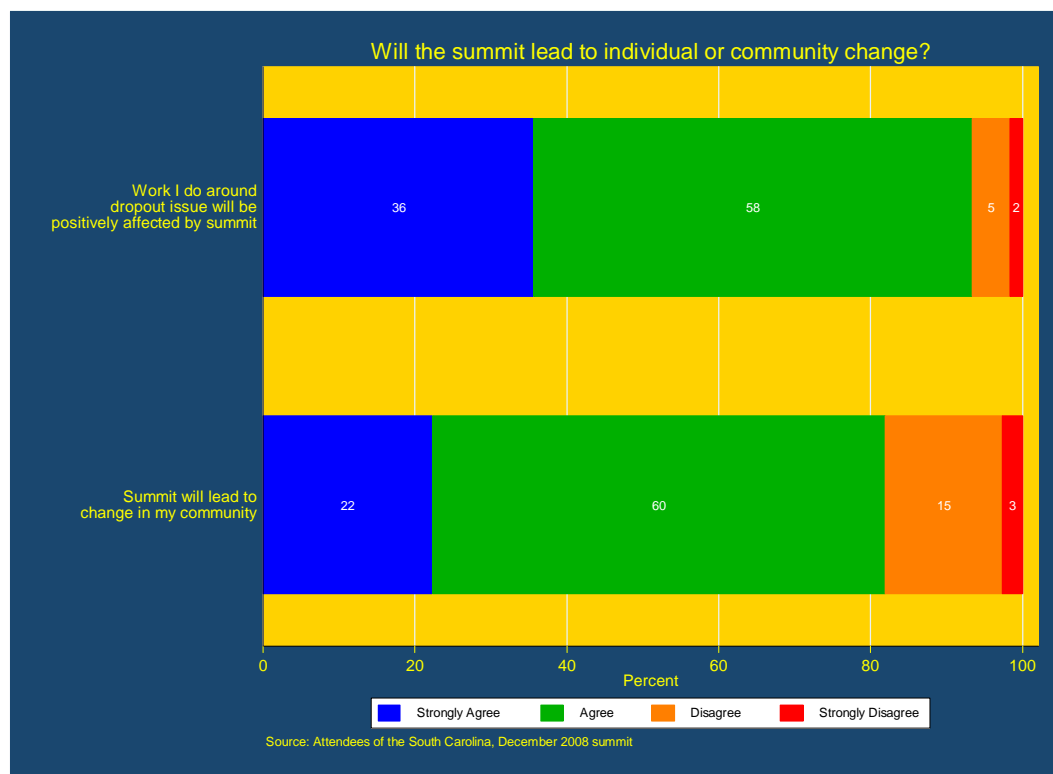
The degree of impact that these summits have is one measure of their success. Reflecting this, the attendee survey asked several follow-up questions to identify in what ways the summit might produce impact. The survey asked the respondent to identify their pre-summit and post summit level of agreement with a variety of statements regarding the high school dropout issue (See Graph 8).
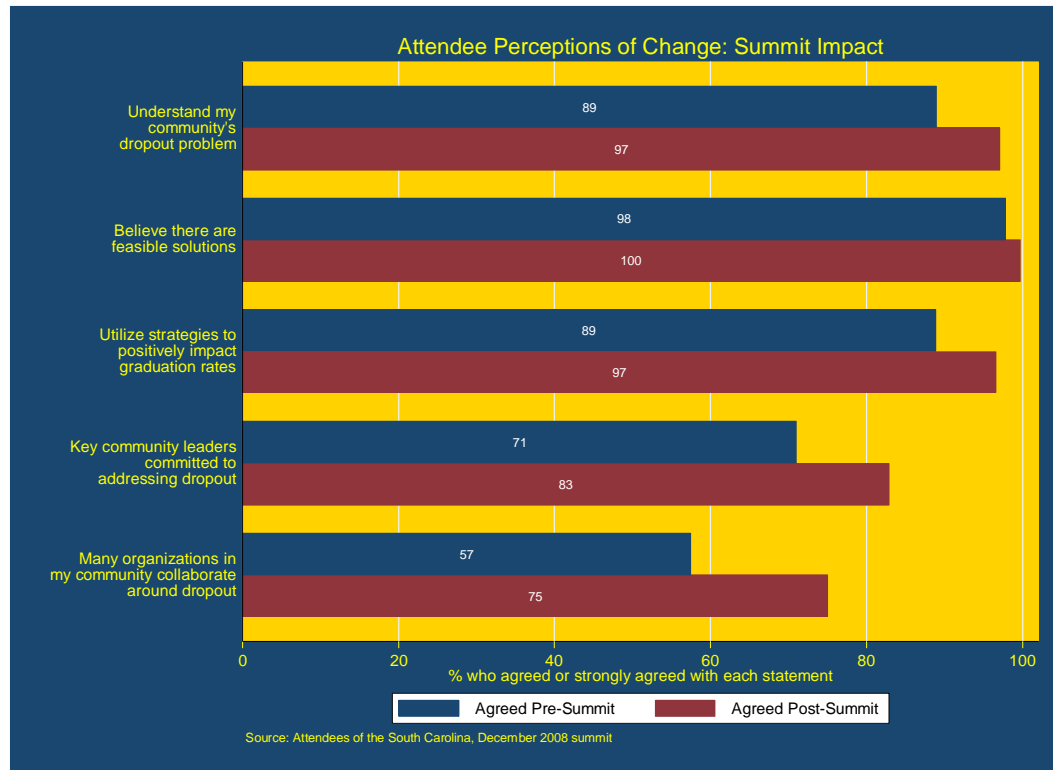
Impact on Perceptions/Knowledge: The percent of survey respondents who said they agreed that they had "a good understanding of the dropout problem in my community" increased from 89 percent to number 97 percent from pre- to post summit. Ninety-eight percent of South Carolina respondents believed "there are feasible solutions to the dropout issue" before the summit and 100 percent believed so after the summit.[3]

Impact on Individual Action: The percentage of people that believed they were utilizing strategies at work that were positively impacting the graduation rate changed from 89 percent to 97 percent.

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[3] This value does not reach statistic significance due to the relatively small number of respondents or the relatively small number of change.
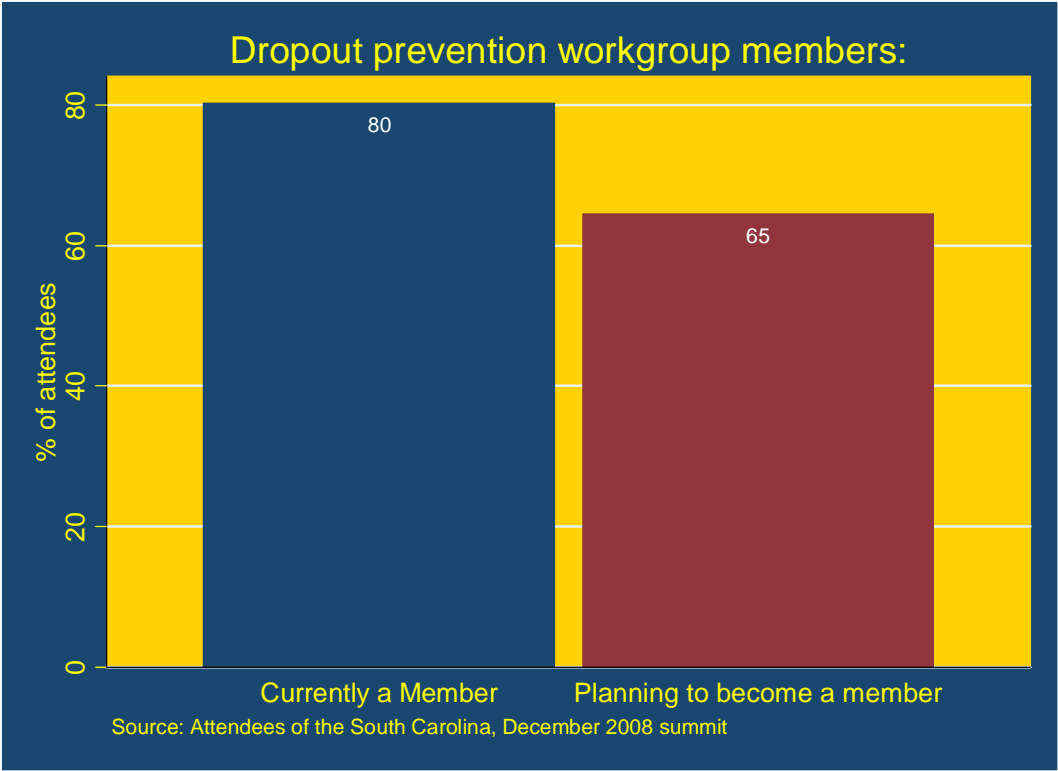
Impact on Community: Attendees were asked the degree to which they believed the summit had impact on the community. The percent of individuals who agreed that "key community leaders are committed to addressing the dropout issue" changed from 71 percent to 83 percent. The pre-to post summit level of agreement that "organizations in my community collaborate around the dropout issue" went from 57 percent to 75 percent.

Graph 8

Attendee Perceptions of Change: Summit Impact

Statement	Agreed Pre-Summit	Agreed Post-Summit
Understand my community's dropout problem	89	97
Believe there are feasible solutions	98	100
Utilize strategies to positively impact graduation rates	89	97
Key community leaders committed to addressing dropout	71	83
Many organizations in my community collaborate around dropout	57	75

% who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

To determine if the summit opened doors for attendees to become more involved in the dropout issue, we asked 1) if the attendee is currently participating in a workgroup or organization whose focus is dropout, and if not 2) if the attendee plans to participate in such a workgroup or organization after the summit. Among individuals who were not currently workgroup members, 65 percent planned to start working with a group focused on dropout (See Graph 9).

Graph 9

Dropout prevention workgroup members:

Y-axis: % of attendees (0, 20, 40, 60, 80)

- Currently a Member: 80
- Planning to become a member: 65

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

H. Why Students Drop Out and What To Do About It: Attendee Perceptions
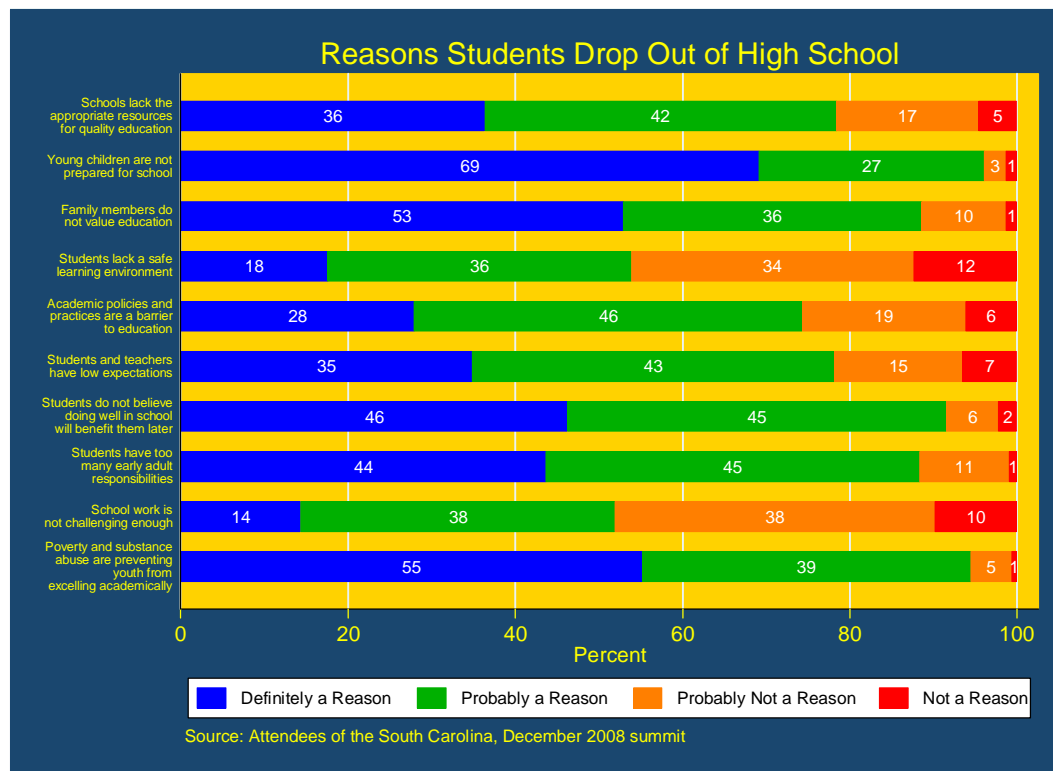
Summit attendees were asked to review a list of 10 commonly cited reasons that students drop out of high school (see Table 2) and identify what they felt were the primary contributors to high school dropout. Similarly, the respondents were presented with a list of 11 commonly cited solutions to the dropout crisis (Table 3) and asked to identify what they thought would be most effective in their community.

"Youth are not prepared for school" was identified as the lead cause of high school dropout among South Carolina survey respondents with 69 percent of respondents identifying this as "definitely a reason". "Poverty and substance abuse" was the next most commonly cited reason students drop out of high school, identified by 55 percent of survey completers as "definitely a reason". This was followed by "family members do not value education" chosen by 53 percent of the respondents (See Graph 10).

Table 2

REASONS STUDENTS DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL
• Schools lack the appropriate resources for quality education.   • Young children are not prepared for school.   • Family members do not value education.   • Students lack a safe learning environment.   • Academic policies and practices are a barrier to education.   • Students and teachers have low expectations.   • Students do not believe doing well in school will benefit them later.   • Students have too many early adult responsibilities.   • School work is not challenging enough.   • Poverty and substance abuse are preventing youth from excelling academically.

Graph 10

Reasons Students Drop Out of High School

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit
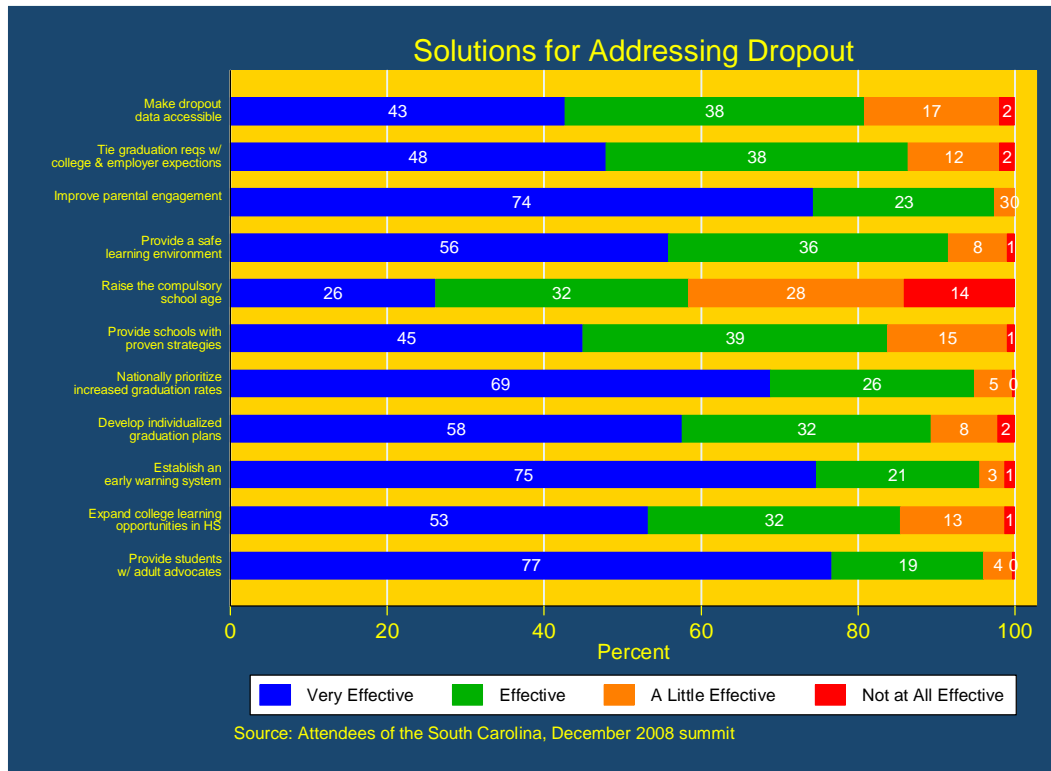
When weighing the primary strategies for confronting the dropout crisis, South Carolina survey completers chose "provide students with adult advocates" most frequently, with 77 percent identifying it as a "very effective" strategy. "Establish an early warning system" was the next most commonly cited strategy, identified by 75 percent as "very effective". This was followed

by "improve parental engagement" which was chosen by 74 percent of respondents (See Graph 11).

Table 3

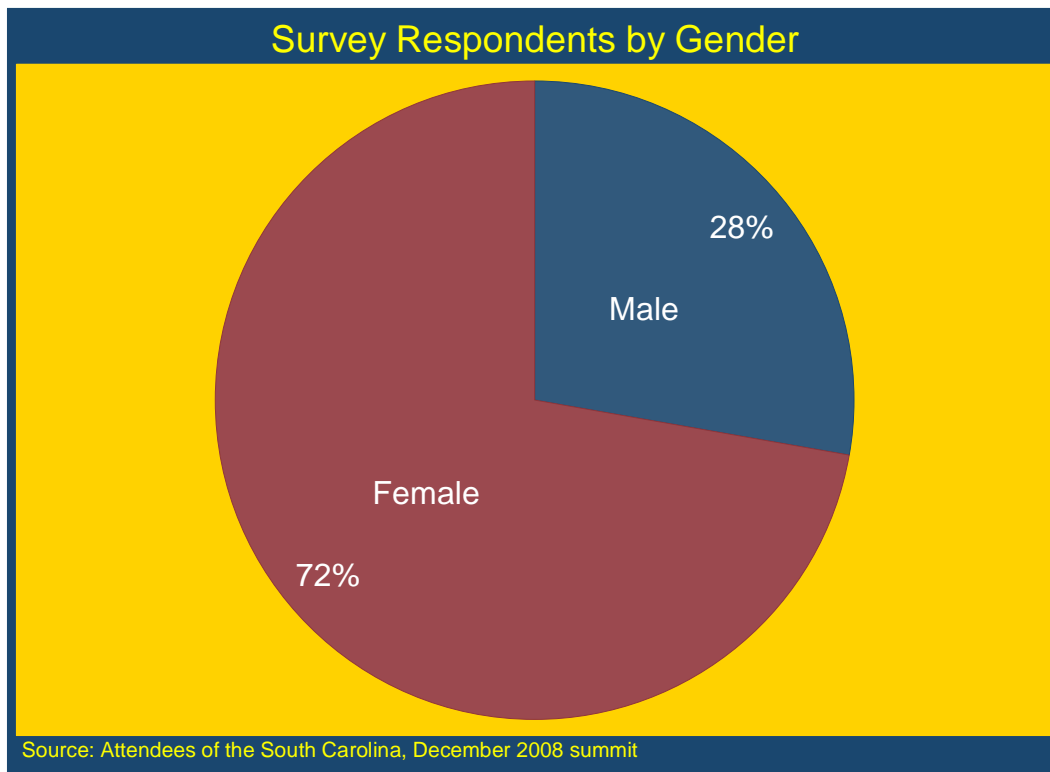| SOLUTIONS FOR ADDRESSING DROPOUT |
|---|
| Make accurate graduation and dropout data readily available. Tie high school graduation requirements to the expectations of colleges and employers. Support greater parental engagement in their children's education. Provide students with a safe learning environment. Raise the compulsory school age requirements under state law. Give schools information about scientifically proven strategies to improve education. Make increasing high school graduation and college/workforce readiness a national priority. Develop individualized graduation plans for each student. Establish an "Early Warning System" that identifies youth who are struggling academically early. Expand college level learning opportunities in high school. Provide students with adult advocates who help identify academic and personal challenges early and get students the support they need. |

Graph 11

Solutions for Addressing Dropout

Solution	Very Effective	Effective	A Little Effective	Not at All Effective
Make dropout data accessible	43	38	17	2
Tie graduation reqs w/ college & employer expectations	48	38	12	2
Improve parental engagement	74	23	3	0
Provide a safe learning environment	56	36	8	1
Raise the compulsory school age	26	32	28	14
Provide schools with proven strategies	45	39	15	1
Nationally prioritize increased graduation rates	69	26	5	0
Develop individualized graduation plans	58	32	8	2
Establish an early warning system	75	21	3	1
Expand college learning opportunities in HS	53	32	13	1
Provide students w/ adult advocates	77	19	4	0

Percent

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

I. Additional Respondent Demographics

Survey respondents were asked to submit basic demographic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, and if they currently have a child (or children) in the school system. Out of the approximately 349 respondents, 72 percent were female and 28 percent were male (See Graph 12).
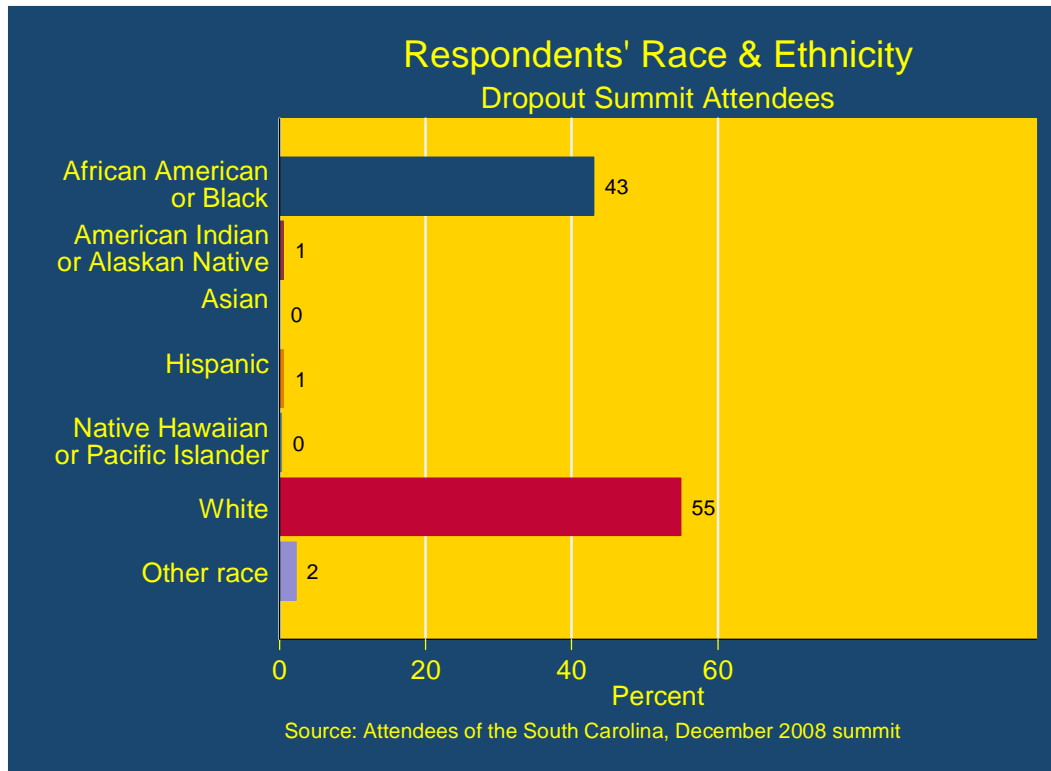
Graph 12

Survey Respondents by Gender

28%

Male

Female

72%

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

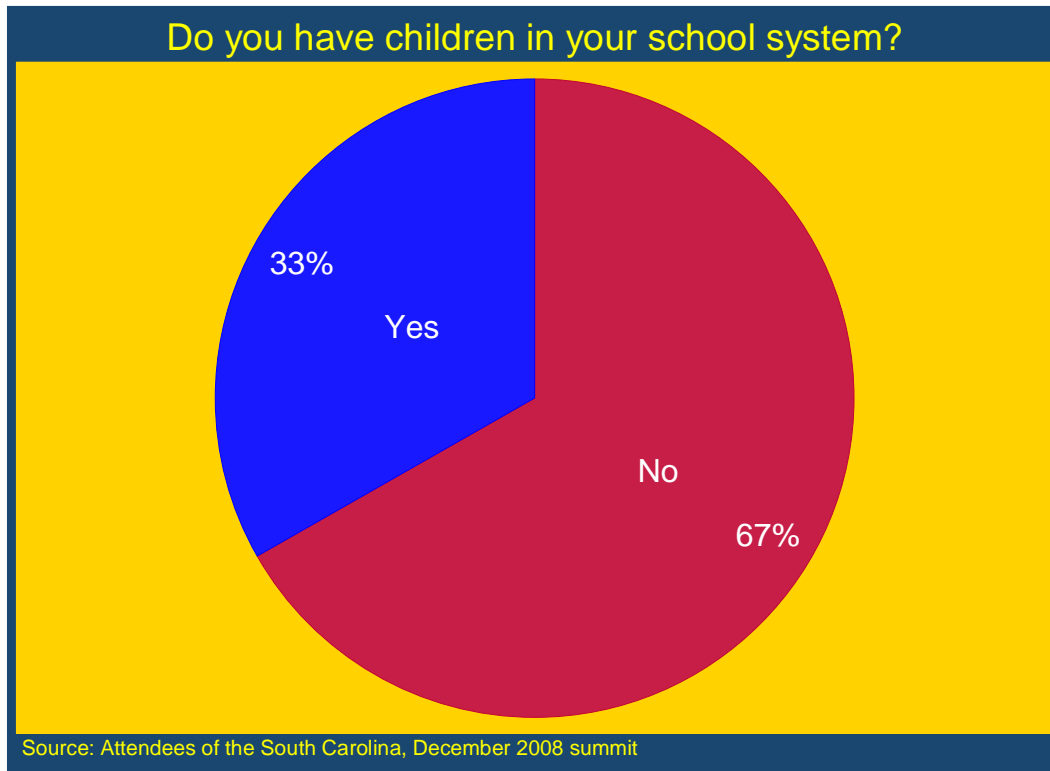The race/ethnicity of the survey respondents is as follows:

- 43 percent African American
- 1 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native
- 0 percent Asian
- 1 percent Hispanic
- 0 percent Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 55 percent White
- 2 percent listed Other

Graph 13

Respondents' Race & Ethnicity
Dropout Summit Attendees

Race/Ethnicity	Percent
African American or Black	43
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1
Asian	0
Hispanic	1
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0
White	55
Other race	2

Percent

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

Individuals were also asked if they currently have a child (or children) in their local school system. The percentage of individuals with one or more children in their local school system was 33 (See Graph 14).

Graph 14

Do you have children in your school system?

33%

Yes

No

67%

Source: Attendees of the South Carolina, December 2008 summit

J. Post Summit Partnerships and Commitments

As part of the summit planning process summit conveners were asked to form a post summit action committee, plan dates for meeting, and identify resources for post summit work. At two weeks post summit the South Carolina summit convener reported that they had identified a post summit action committee, dates for meeting, and identified resources for post summit work.